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DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

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WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: September 14, 2007

Young Muslims Reject Violence

11. A recent survey carried out by the University of Vienna's Institute of Sociology has revealed that the majority of second-generation Muslims living in Austria rejects and condemns violence as a tool to spread their faith. In addition, 77 percent of the interviewees have distanced themselves from Muslims carrying out attacks in Europe. The number of Muslims living in Austria has risen sharply over the past decades, Austrian media note. According to mass-circulation daily Kurier, the Islamic Community in Austria, and with it the about 40,000 Muslims living in the country, is in a difficult situation, given its fragmentation, which makes certain groups prone to reactionary or extremist forces. Turkish Muslims in particular are critical of the Islamic community and its leader Anas Shakfeh, claiming that "the community only speaks for a small fraction of Muslims in Austria - for those who pay the membership fee. All others have no say at all," complains Yavuz Kuscuscu, the President of the Turkish-Austrian Trade Association. Kuscuscu points to the "poor training of teachers" of Islam in Austria, with about "30 to 40 percent preaching a one-sided and fundamentalist interpretation of the Koran," and warns that "if reforms are not carried out soon, Austria will become a breeding ground for fundamentalists."

Fourth Arrest in Terror Suspect Case

12. Police in Canada have arrested a man in connection with the three suspected Austrian militants taken into custody in Vienna on Wednesday. The man arrested in Ottawa was in close contact via the internet with the group in Vienna, according to the Austrian Interior Ministry. The main suspect among the three persons arrested in Austria has been identified as the leader of an Islamist organization, the Islamic Youth Austria (IJOe), which had drawn attention to itself with extremist and anti-democratic statements in the past. The Muslim community in Austria has repeatedly distanced itself from the group. Semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung, reporting on the arrest of four suspected militants, three in Austria and one in Canada, says that the Austrian and international intelligence services had had their sights on the key suspect and his father for years. The 22-year-old founder of the Muslim youth organization IJOe has been known to glorify the Taliban and also called for a boycott of the 2006 general election in Austria, which he labeled "un-Islamic." The Wiener Zeitung also quotes the head of the Islamic Community in Austria, Anas Shakfeh, as stressing that he welcomed the arrests. Greens leader Alexander Van der Bellen also applauded the move, but cautioned against "hysteria" that could lead to a backlash against

Austria's Muslim residents. Meanwhile, FPÖ boss Heinz-Christian Strache has demanded that the Islamic community be stripped of its rights as a "statutory body," including its right to collect membership fees. Mass-circulation daily Kurier writes that the BZÖ has called for the introduction of a "special commission on Islam" in Austria, as well as round-the-clock observation of Islamic institutions in the country. Justice Minister Maria Berger and the SPÖ have dismissed the call for harsh measures as proposed by the FPÖ and BZÖ. SPÖ floor leader Josef Cap argues that "it would be dangerous to marginalize Islam as such, because that would only benefit the radical forces' goals." Similarly, in independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten, political analyst and religious expert Michael Ley warns against marginalizing Muslims or forcing them into illegality, and calls for a state-run training program for imams. According to Ley, "Austria is probably less of a potential target than Germany or France. But whether it is safe, is hard to say." A really important step, the expert continues, would be "to establish close cooperation of Muslim circles with the Austrian authorities. This would be decisive, because the Muslim population is much more aware of threat potentials within their own circles." However, "outlawing mosques," as some far-right politicians in Austria have called for, "would accomplish nothing."

No GM-Free Zone

13. The European Court of Justice has ruled that Upper Austria may not impose a complete ban on genetically modified farming, thereby isolating itself as a "GM free zone." Upper Austria introduced a ban in 2002, which was rejected by the EU Commission in 2003 and unsuccessfully appealed by the province in 2005. The final ruling has now put an end to Upper Austria's latest plea of annulment. Like several Austrian media, semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung reports on the European Court of Justice's rejection of Upper Austria's ban on genetically modified farming. Within the EU, Upper Austria has earned a reputation as a "Gallic village" for its campaign against the use of genetically modified plants. The region sees itself as a pioneer of GM-free farming, for which it also has the broad support of residents and farmers. In light of strict EU import restrictions on GM foods, the court's decision seems somewhat paradoxical, the Wiener Zeitung argues. Despite the ruling, precautionary legislation in Upper Austria, which remains uncontested by the EU, makes it difficult for farmers to get permission to use GM seeds and plants.

Bush Pledges Iraq Troop Reduction

14. US President George Bush has announced the limited withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. In a televised address to the nation Thursday, the President said he had accepted the recommendations of the top US military commander in Iraq, Gen. David Petraeus, that over 5,000 personnel could be home by Christmas, while thousands more may be withdrawn by summer next year. A commentator for ORF radio argues that President Bush's announcement of a partial withdrawal is "not really surprising." The commentator suggests there is "no genuine change of course" in the Bush administration's Iraq policy. He also quotes the US President as stressing that the US presence in Iraq would continue beyond his presidency. "Successor to inherit Iraq," headlines mass-circulation provincial daily Kleine Zeitung, reporting like several major Austrian media on President Bush's televised address on Iraq Thursday. The US President, the daily continues, is "stubbornly sticking to his notorious mistakes." The "real problem for whoever succeeds Bush will be that any kind of solution for Iraq will have a series of harmful side-effects," says the daily. Centrist daily Die Presse runs the headline "Bush's Iraq plan under fire," and explains that for the Democrats, the partial troop withdrawal as announced by the US President is not far-reaching enough. The daily quotes presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton as criticizing the President's plan as "too little, too late," and "unacceptable for Congress and the people, who have made it clear they want to bring the troops home and end the war." Independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten reports on what it calls a "Democrat counterstrike." According to the newspaper, the "US Democrats are changing their strategy: Instead of calling for a definite date for the pullout of US forces from Iraq, they now want to re-define the military's

mandate in Iraq." At the heart of their strategy is the so-called "Mission Transmission," which envisaged putting US troops in charge of controlling Iraq's borders, training Iraqi security forces and fighting terrorists. This, the Democrats argue, could be done with less than half of the 130,000 troops.

Iraqi Insurgents Kill Key US Ally

¶5. An Iraqi tribal leader and key Sunni ally of the US and Iraqi governments has been killed in a bomb attack in the city of Ramadi in the western Iraqi province of Anbar. Sheikh Abdul Sattar Abu Risha was the leader of an alliance of Sunni Arab tribes that rose up against al Qaeda in Iraq. The White House has harshly condemned the attack, Austrian media say, according to ORF online news.

Interview with General Obering

¶6. A leading Austrian daily publishes an interview with General Henry Obering, who has been heading the US Missile Defense Agency MDA since 2004. Gen. Obering said the US welcomed the Russian missile defense system, and warned against the growing threat from Iran, which will "become quite apparent." He also discussed topics including Austrian Defense Minister Darbos' statements on the US missile defense plans.

In an interview with centrist daily Die Presse, General Henry Obering, the head of the US Missile Defense Agency, said that he is "confident" regarding the acceptance of the US missile defense plans. "In the coming months, the threat will become more apparent - to the extent that we can't ignore it any longer. On the other hand, support from the governments of NATO members for the project is growing." Iran "will make that clear. Even now, they have a very intensive missile development program. Taking their progress and developments into account, I assume Iran will soon take steps that will make the danger apparent." The General also believes that in the case of Tehran, deterrence won't work: "Not with this kind of government. We cannot count on reasonable governments or leaders here. Just listen to the rhetoric: North Korea sees itself at war with the US, but Iran is talking about wiping entire countries off the map. Besides, the missiles were developed and distributed in large numbers. So there's the threat that terrorists could gain access to the missiles, or that a radical Islamic group within a government gains control of them and launches an attack to further its own interests."

McCaw